

**ATTRIBUTED TO JEAN LOUIS FORAIN**

(Reims 1852 - 1931 Paris)

***End of lunch or Portrait of a young woman seated at a table, in front of a cup of coffee, probably Portrait of Marguerite Charpentier***

Circa 1880

Pastel on canvas

56 x 46 cm

Bears on the back of the canvas the stamp of « P. Gay », well-known supplier of canvases (toile) and art materials for artists in 19th-century Paris.

Bears on the back a label with the inscription in pen and brown ink « *Madame Charpentier N°81* »

**Provenance:**

Collection of Madame Charpentier, probably Madame Marguerite Charpentier (Madame Georges Charpentier, born Marguerite Louise Lemonnier (1848-1904));

Private collection, Paris.



Familiar with the salons of Nina de Callias and the Countess of Loynes as well as that of Marguerite Charpentier, where he met the writers Maurice Barrès, Paul Bourget, Forain frequented Edgar Degas and Édouard Manet. He began his career as a painter alongside the Impressionists with whom he participated in several exhibitions between 1879 and 1886. He was very close to his elder Degas.

His work spans a variety of mediums, but his pastels hold a special place due to their vivid portrayal of Parisian life and his unique technique.

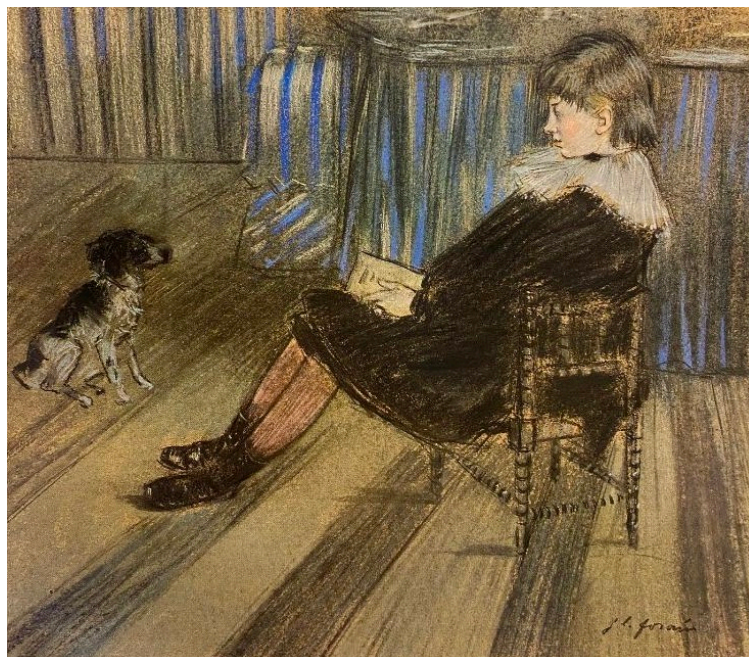
Jean-Louis Forain's use of pastels in the 1870s and 1880s was a key part of his artistic practice during the early stages of his career. Forain, closely associated with Edgar Degas and the Impressionists, began to develop his own distinctive style using pastels, particularly in his depictions of Parisian life. Pastels allowed him to work quickly, capturing fleeting moments and the spontaneity of everyday scenes, which became a hallmark of his art during this period. His pastel work in the late 19th century was heavily influenced by his close friendship with Edgar Degas, who was one of the most accomplished pastel artists of the time. Degas encouraged Forain to explore the medium, and Forain adopted Degas's approach of working with layered, vibrant strokes to build texture and form. Like Degas, Forain used pastels not just for their color but for their expressive potential and the ability to suggest movement and atmosphere.

Forain's pastel technique relied on quick, loose strokes, often with a more sketch-like quality compared to Degas's more polished finish. He applied pastels in a way that emphasized the spontaneity of the scene, often using broad, gestural marks to suggest movement, emotion, or the play of light across a figure or object. His technique was less about exactitude and more about conveying the energy of the moment. The artist's very particular technique is fully reflected in our pastel: liveliness of the line, sketched and unfinished appearance. This confirms the attribution to Forain.

Forain's pastels demonstrate a strong focus on line. He often used sharp, bold lines to outline figures, emphasizing their gestures and interactions, a method that gave his work an almost caricature-like quality. His color palette in pastels was generally muted but varied, with rich earth tones, grays, and ochres dominating his scenes. These characteristics are still found in our End of Lunch scene.

The artist, like Degas, experimented with layering pastels to create texture and depth. He used multiple layers of pastel to build up rich tones in areas of shadow or light, especially when depicting skin tones or the folds of clothing. This layering technique allowed him to create a sense of depth and texture, giving his figures a tactile, lifelike quality, while still retaining the immediacy of a sketch. He used soft pastels, which allowed for quick, expressive marks as well as smooth blending. The vibrancy of pastel pigments also suited his need for both immediacy and depth.

There are stylistic comparisons to be made between the present *End of Lunch* and Forain's pastel below: Jean-Louis Forain, « *Fillette assise, jouant avec un chien* », pastel, 48,2 x 58,4 cm, signed lower right « J. L. FORAIN », provenance: Durand-Ruel, private collection, New York.



Forain's pastel work shares similarities with that of his mentor Degas, but there are notable differences: a less refined finish and a sketch like quality. While Degas often refined his pastels to a high degree, Forain's works generally have a looser, more immediate quality. His focus was often more on capturing a fleeting moment or mood than on achieving a polished finish. Our pastel feels immediate, capturing the end of lunch with quick and fluid strokes.

While often working in a subdued color scheme, he punctuated his pastels with brighter, more vibrant hues for emphasis. Here the white porcelain of the coffee cups is highlighted with red and the silver of the cutlery shimmers.

Jean-Louis Forain (1852–1931) was a multifaceted French artist known for his work as a painter, printmaker, watercolorist, and caricaturist. His career spanned the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and he is often associated with the Impressionist movement, though his work evolved to reflect other influences such as Realism, Symbolism, and social critique.

He was born on October 23, 1852, in Reims, France, into a working-class family. His father was a craftsman and a lithographer, which likely introduced Forain to the world of art and printmaking at an early age. In 1863, when Forain was still a boy, his family moved to Paris, the center of the art world. He received early training at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris under the tutelage of academic painter Jean-Léon Gérôme and later, the Symbolist painter Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux. These two teachers represented very different artistic approaches—Gérôme's strict academic style and Carpeaux's expressive Romanticism—both of which left their mark on Forain's work.

Around 1877, Forain met Edgar Degas, who became a major influence on his work. Degas introduced him to the Impressionists and invited him to exhibit with them. Forain participated in the Impressionist exhibitions of 1879, 1880, 1881, and 1886, though his approach was distinct from many of the group's more traditional landscape and light-focused works. Under Degas' influence, Forain developed an interest in the everyday scenes of Parisian life, including theaters, cafes, and the ballet. He shared with Degas a fascination with depicting the human figure in motion and the subtleties of human interaction.

In 1891, Forain married Jeanne Bosc, a sculptor, who also influenced his work. His wife was a model of elegance and style, often depicted in his paintings. Their marriage allowed Forain to delve deeper into more personal, domestic subjects, including motherhood and family life.

In the late 19th century, Forain's work began to take on more somber and introspective themes, particularly after the Dreyfus Affair, a major political scandal in France. He started focusing on more serious and moralistic subjects, moving away from the frivolity of his earlier work. He became interested in religious themes, producing works that depicted biblical scenes or conveyed moral lessons, a clear departure from the light-hearted satire of his earlier career.

Forain's work gained widespread recognition during his lifetime. He was awarded numerous honors, including the prestigious Légion d'honneur in 1893. In 1925, he became a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, a prestigious institution in France.

He was a versatile artist who moved between painting, printmaking, and illustration, but always with a keen eye for the human condition. His ability to balance satire, realism, and social critique made him one of the most distinctive voices of his time. Whether through his Impressionist scenes of Parisian life or his later, more moralistic works, Forain's legacy lies in his vivid depictions of both the vibrancy and the contradictions of modern urban life.

According to the label on the back, our pastel was in the collection of « *Madame Charpentier* ». The dates of execution of the pastel, as well as its probable author, lead us to believe that it is Marguerite Charpentier, wife of Georges Charpentier. The famous couple of collectors also owned



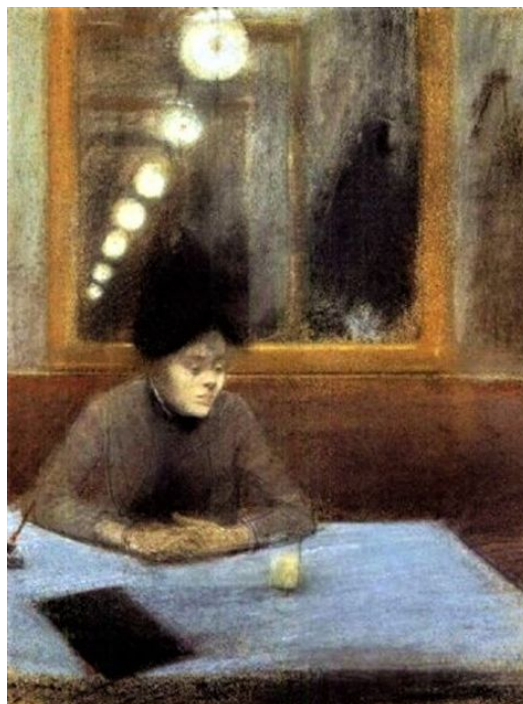
a watercolor on paper mounted on board by Jean-Louis Forain, « *Conversation dans le salon de Georges Charpentier* », circa 1879, 31 x 19 cm, signed lower right. This watercolor attests not only to the fact that the couple owned at least one work by the artist but above all that Forain frequented the salon of Georges and Marguerite Charpentier. Jean-Louis Forain had indeed an important relationship with Georges Charpentier, a well-known French publisher and art collector of the late 19th century. Charpentier was a central figure in the Parisian art world, and his patronage and support helped shape the careers of many prominent artists, particularly the Impressionists. Charpentier was known for supporting the Impressionist artists and building a prestigious collection of their works. His home, which he shared with his wife, Marguerite, was a salon for artists, writers, and intellectuals.



Charpentier and his wife were especially supportive of artists like Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, and Édouard Manet. Renoir painted a famous *Portrait of Madame Georges Charpentier and her Children* (1878), which illustrates the close relationship between the Charpentier family and the Impressionist movement. Forain's association with Georges Charpentier likely came through his close relationship with Edgar Degas and the broader Impressionist circle. As an emerging artist during the 1870s and 1880s, Forain was a part of the same social and artistic networks that Georges Charpentier frequented. The couple was known to support and collect works from artists featured in these exhibitions, including Forain. Charpentier's salon was famous for bringing together the worlds of art, literature, and politics, offering Forain a space to engage with other influential figures of the time.

Although specific details of the works Charpentier may have purchased from Forain are less documented compared to those of Renoir or Monet, Charpentier's support was part of the broader network of patrons that helped Forain rise in the Parisian art scene.

Furthermore, our pastel, which is not signed, probably lost its authorship after the death of the Charpentier couple. Forain did not systematically sign his works at the time: for example, one of his famous pastel, « *La lettre et l'absinthe* », circa 1885, 44,7 x 35,7 cm, is not signed. The intimate subject of our pastel suggests a specific commission directly to the artist.



Very attractive for its sketchiness, less refined finish and muted brown palette with vibrant touches, our pastel highlights all the characteristics of Forain's very particular style.

Forain's pastels demonstrate his ability to combine a rapid, expressive technique with a keen observation of everyday life. His work captures both the energy and complexity of the sitter, offering a vivid glimpse into the life of the Parisian upper class, of which the Charpentier couple were important players. Could this then be an intimate portrait of Madame Charpentier, who was also portrayed several times by Renoir?

A certain resemblance between the model of our pastel and Madame Charpentier appears here. The model stands out against the background, in front of her a bourgeois table set with porcelain and silverware, the end of a lunch. In the background, we can make out, in the woodwork, a porcelain cabinet with glass fronts, used to hold and display porcelain. It is possible that Forain interacted with or even sketched the Charpentiers, given his proximity to them in artistic and social circles.



The emergence of the bourgeoisie in the 19th century led to a drastic development of the portrait genre; the pastel technique then presented several advantages. The pause time was shortened, for example, because of the speed of execution possible with pastel. It was then favored to depict intimate scenes like ours.

Through Charpentier's salon and social connections, Forain was able to gain access to influential patrons and collectors, helping to solidify his place in the Parisian art world.

This pastel attributed to one of the most important French modern artist, expressive and sketched with a delicate handling of light and color, showcases the accomplished pastelist that Forain was.